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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions need to recognize and accommodate the individual needs of learners from culturally diverse backgrounds, of whom a large number are Blacks and Hispanics. To accommodate the educational needs of these learners, educators need to build on their entry-level strengths, which have been identified as: (1) orientation toward sports and other activities requiring use of psychomotor skills; (2) desire to engage in role playing: (3) problem-oriented approach to learning; (4) frequent use of an inductive approach to learning; (5) perseverance; (6) abstract verbal ability; and (7) need for cooperative learning experiences. The life style of the culturally diverse learner often places emphasis on skills and norms that are in conflict with the middle-class orientation of most schools. Teaching methods that closely match the learning styles of these learners include visual, kinesthetic, and tactile strategies; role-playing and socio-dramatic strategies; the use of a performance contract; computer-assisted instruction; and a tutoring plan. Teaching strategies that fully accommodate these learners' needs must continue to be explored in order to ensure that these learners reach their full potential. (DJR)

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STRATEGIES FOR INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES FOR THE CULTURALLY DIVERSE LEARNER

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Strategies for Individualizing Instruction
Across the Disciplines for the
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Colleges and Universities in this society are confronted with an opportunity and challenge to educate all individuals regardless of race, creed, sex, socio-economic status or cultural background (Hoover, 1977).

In part this challenge has resulted from failure of educational institutions to fully recognize and accomodate the individual needs and interests of learners from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Who is the culturally diverse learner? Many of these learners are from the lower socio-economic strata. However, all culturally diverse learners are not disadvantaged. There are many groups represented among the culturally diverse; however, the majority of this group is comprised of Blacks and Hispanics (Riessman, 1962).

According to psychologists, sociologists and educators, many diverse learners enter the classroom with positive strengths that enhance the learning process. However, when judged against standards of most schools, the culturally diverse learner suddenly appears to exhibit negative attributes that limit the learning process (Hoover, 1977).

In order to accomodate the educational needs of these learners, educators need to build on the entry-level strengths of culturally diverse learners. Riessman (1962) identified the following strengths of these learners:

1. They are physically oriented. These learners often excell in sports and other activities which require the use of skills from the psychomotor domain.
2. They have a desire to engage in role playing. The

The diverse learner often uses this strength to act out behavior in an attempt to solve problems.

3. They are problem oriented in their approach to learning. In order to fully understand a concept, it is often necessary to provide a concrete representation of an abstract idea.
4. They often learn from an inductive approach. Middle-class learners tend to be more deductive in their approach to learning. However, the culturally diverse learner has not been socialized to learn from wholes to parts. For example, these learners often perform well in computational mathematics, however, they are less successful in solving word problems which require deductive reasoning.
5. They are often persevering in their approach to learning. Many learners from this group have been labeled dull or stupid. These labels have been attached to culturally diverse learners due to their inability to complete intellectual learning tasks at the same pace as the middle-class learners. These learners are often very cautious or meticulous in their learning styles. Of course there is a vast difference between a slow learner and an incompetent learner.
6. The culturally diverse learner is often described as verbally abstract. It is often assumed that this type of learner is inarticulate and non-verbal.

However, these learners bring into the classroom a very complex language. This language must be acknowledged by educators in order to understand and meet individual needs and interests of culturally diverse learners. Culturally diverse learners communicate freely in their own environment. The difficulty is between standard language and informal language communicated within their own culture. Listed below is an example which illustrates verbal ability hidden from the minds of middle-class oriented educators. The example was taken from the writings of the well known Black poet, Langston Hughes (cited in Riessman, 1962).

Motto

"I play it cool
and dig all jive
That's the reason
I stay alive.
My Motto,
As I live and learn, is:
Dig and Be Dug
In Return." (p.6).

In formal English this poem should be translated to mean the following:

I do not bother anyone
I accept each individual
Thats how I survive.
My belief,
Based on my experiences
in life is:
Accept other people
and they will accept
you in return.

7. Culturally diverse learners often express a need for cooperative learning experiences. While there are many

negative sides to the family life of these learners such as divorce, the use of physical punishment as a discipline technique, inadequate food and shelter; there are some strengths which too often are ignored. The culturally diverse often rely on the extended family members such as grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins for security and as a support system. These learners possess a need for loyalty and cooperation within their social groups. The use of group activities in the classroom is an effective approach to learning which should be employed in the classroom for accomodating social and academic needs.

The list of strengths of the culturally diverse learner is not comprehensive. Only those strengths that were deemed most critical for enhancing effective academic learning were examined.

After examining the strengths of these learners; what teaching strategies should be employed with this group in real life classroom settings to fully accomodate their academic strengths?

It has been found that a number of strategies such as the lecture method, that accomodates the learning styles of middle-class learners often fail to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners (Hoover, 1977).

As described earlier, the life style of the culturally diverse learner often places emphasis on skills and norms which are in total conflict with the middle-class orientation of most schools. Therefore, educators in every discipline must be responsive to these learners by identifying individualized ways to teaching which will build upon the

strengths of these students.

While there is no absolute prescription for meeting the needs of these learners; a number of individualized strategies have proven to be successful. Some of the strategies that most closely match the learning styles of these learners include the following (Hoover, 1977, Kierstead, 1986):

1. Visual, kinesthetic and tacticle teaching strategies have been effective when matched with these highly physical oriented learning style individual (Coronett, 1983).
2. Role-playing and socio-dramatic teaching strategies have proven to be effective with the culturally diverse learner. This technique allows these learners to employ slang and other verbal and non-verbal expressions that they feel at ease using. Examples of role-playing which can be used when teaching the culturally diverse learner in any discipline include games that are often employed in mathematics, economics, and social studies.
3. The contract is another individualized approach to teaching that has proven to be an effective strategy for meeting the needs of this cooperative style learner. Such a strategy often involves signed contracts between the teacher and student. It identifies tasks to be completed, due date of assignments, and grades the students expect to earn. This approach has also been found to foster high motivation among the culturally diverse learner. The contract also allows

these learners to work at an individual pace without competing with peers (Hoover, 1977).

4. Computer-assisted instruction is another strategy which permits the teacher to individualize instruction. It provides the hands-on experiences and drill needed by the slow, persevering student. The computer provides the student with immediate feedback. According to Hunter (1984) feedback strongly influences the motivation required to succeed in learning.
5. The tutoring plan is a final strategy that can be employed to enhance learning across disciplines for culturally diverse learners. This strategy allows for one-on-one instruction. In many colleges and universities peer tutors provide instruction for learners in a variety of disciplines.

These strategies provide teachers with alternatives for meeting individual needs of learners. Matching teaching styles with learning styles starts the teacher to recognizing individual differences and to begin creating a classroom climate to foster learning among culturally diverse students.

The study of teaching strategies that fully accomodate the needs of culturally diverse learners must continue to be explored in order to insure that these learners reach their full potential. Cultural experiences of these learners must be acknowledged as educators explore effective ways of teaching learners in all disciplines.

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